

WONDERLAND

Curated by Elizabeth Denny & Katie Alice Fitz Gerald

AICON

February 29 – April 6, 2024 | Opening Reception February 28, 6 - 8 pm



Alina Bliumis, *Pleasant Island*, 2023, Watercolor and watercolor pencil on wood, artist's steel frame, 16.5 x 20.5 x 3 in
Photo courtesy of the Artist and SITUATIONS

Aicon is pleased to announce *Wonderland*, a group exhibition including work by artists: Alina Bliumis, Jennifer Coates, Azadeh Gholizadeh, Lizzie Gill, Anna Ortiz, Dana Sherwood and Stephen Thorpe, curated by Elizabeth Denny and Katie Alice Fitz Gerald. The exhibition will be on view in the ground floor gallery from February 29 through April 6, 2024.

A wonderland is a fantastical landscape, a place whose beauty or bounty is beyond reality. It is rarely possible to enter a wonderland, but when it is, one enters it through a magical portal and finds oneself in a liminal space; an alternate reality where the rules are all different. The artists in the exhibition, *Wonderland*, show us what it would be like to enter their particular worlds, whether that means being born from the belly of an animal, passing through to another reimagined time and culture, or transforming humanity's relationship with nature.

The artists Azadeh Gholizadeh, Anna Ortiz and Alina Bliumis deploy the liminal space of the wonderland to examine the global and political forces at play in the real world. They draw on both personal and collective histories about how natural environments have been reconstructed through human interference and political intervention. Alina Bliumis reimagines pre-industrial idyllic landscapes as *Zoo Paintings*, luscious scenes of natural beauty encased in steel artist frames. These frames evoke borders, fencing, and prisons, which are more recently associated with postcolonial displacement of people. Azadeh Gholizadeh, who was born in Tehran, Iran, and now lives in Chicago, creates woven scenes that speak to both her past and present homes. Her work synthesizes her memories and experiences into a single, subjective, imagined world. Anna Ortiz's landscapes allow an immediacy to her Mexican heritage by reimagining pre-colonial Aztec and Mayan archeological sites. She draws our attention to the displacement of second generation immigrants, which creates ruptures in personal histories and culture. Her surrealist scenes highlight the chasm and perceived hierarchy between her two cultural reference points - contemporary painting and Precolumbian sculpture. These artists reimagine political and subjective boundaries, fomenting a new vision for belonging and culture.

In the wonderland, time can be experienced as repetitive or cyclical in nature and in some cases, look backwards and forwards simultaneously. With his work, Stephen Thorpe brings us into a futurescape combining the

digital and natural worlds. The commentary is dystopian where the digital relic resides in a wonderland along with flora and fauna. In his work, the human figure is replaced with an alternative protagonist: along with arcades, birds are symbols of the past as well as harbingers of the future. The seductive paintings full of color and movement draw the viewer in, however, as we remain outside of these worlds, unsure of whether we are looking at an interior or outdoor space, the paintings become omens for a post-anthropocene world.

The disruption of time and the power of objects acting as gateways into alternative histories is emphasized in Lizzie Gill's work. Gill uses imagery of classical vessels alongside domestic objects as vehicles to overturn our understanding of such items, which has been shaped by museums. Gill's paintings speak to a gendered perspective of domestic environments, inviting the viewer to consider the still life scene as a surreal landscape. She reconsiders connoisseurship and collection of such objects and their histories.

In the work of Jennifer Coates and Dana Sherwood, we see questions of social order disrupted through the interaction of humans and animals within quasi-mythological landscapes. Coates paints the classical Roman goddess Diana immersed in an electric landscape of otherworldly beauty, alongside her hunting dogs and other woodland creatures, such as wolves and deer. Coates draws from classical mythology to show how animals and humans coexist, sometimes sharing forms. She destabilizes the hierarchy which we as humans have imposed on the natural order of living things. Dana Sherwood pushes the relationship between human and animal further into the surreal in her ongoing series where a female figure is secreted in the belly of an animal. There she may indulge and rest, protected from the outside world. Sherwood paints her figures surrounded by feasts of cakes and treats, thereby attaching human fulfillment and pleasure to the sustenance of nature.

For more information and sales inquiries, email Hannah at hannah@aicongallery.com.

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Jennifer Coates, *Diana Nemorensis*, 2022, Acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 72 x 96 in
Photo courtesy of the Artist and High Noon Gallery